

BOOK REVIEW

Acacias of South Australia. D. J. E. Whibley with assistance from N. N. Donner. Illustrated by L. Dutkiewicz. Handbooks to the Flora and Fauna of South Australia. Government Printer, South Australia. 29 February 1980. 240 pp.; 40 col. & 60 b. & w. photographs; 104 b. & w. figures. Price \$7.90 plus postage.

The genus *Acacia* is one of the most widespread and important in Australia and its species form such a conspicuous feature of much of the vegetation that there is a demand for information about them. *Acacias of South Australia* with its informative text, illustrations and photographs certainly satisfies this demand for the 97 species of *Acacia* recognized as occurring in South Australia at the time the book was published.

The taxonomic complexity of the Australian *Acacia* species present formidable problems in classification and identification. Mindful of these difficulties, the author has provided an excellent illustrated key in addition to the more conventional descriptive key. The illustrated key is designed to enable the identifier to first compare the specimen with the illustrations in Figure 1 in which the species are divided into seven groups. After assigning a specimen to one of these groups, the identifier turns to the relevant Figure in which all of the species within that group are illustrated. Although more laborious, the descriptive key nevertheless offers a generally more reliable way of identifying a specimen.

Each species is illustrated by excellent black and white line drawings and a habit photograph (many in colour), and a map showing the distribution within South Australia is provided. It would have been useful to cite in the captions the herbarium specimens from which the illustrations were drawn. Where available, common names are given along with the derivation of the specific epithet and relevant synonymy. Species descriptions are concise and notes on flowering times, habitat, cultivation, uses and related species are provided. The book also contains a useful glossary and a distribution chart recording the presence or absence of each species within the 13 phytogeographic regions into which South Australia is divided by the State Herbarium.

The Egyptian thorn is referred to on p. 34 as *A. arabica*. However, the correct name for this plant is *A. nilotica* (L.) Willd. ex Del.: *A. arabica* is a synonym. *A. nilotica* is a very widely distributed and polymorphic species within which nine subspecies are currently recognized. The taxon referred to in the note at the foot of p. 218 under *A. nilotica* is either subsp. *tomentosa* (Benth.) Brenan or subsp. *indica* (Benth.) Brenan, the two subspecies being distinguished primarily on the nature of the pubescence on the young branchlets (not mentioned in the description provided). The two specimens referred to under *A. arabica* are likewise referable to a subspecies of *A. nilotica*.

It is disappointing to find no reference to the existence of a new species in the north-western region of South Australia described as *A. symonii* Whibley, in *J. Adelaide Bot. Gard.* 2(2): 167-169 (13 May 1980), less than three months after the publication of the book. For the sake of completeness, it would have been appropriate to mention this species in the book, even as *Acacia* sp. nov. However, taxonomic botany is an unending synthesis and it is, of course, impossible to achieve finality, especially in a genus as large and complex as *Acacia*. Presumably *A. symonii* will be incorporated into the second edition of this very useful book along with other additions and alterations.

The book was written for the professional botanist, amateur enthusiast and layman and the contents satisfy the requirements of all parties. It is well produced, inexpensive, and a convenient size (21 × 15 cm) suitable for use in the field. *Acacias of South Australia* is bound to stimulate further interest in this fascinating genus and the author and his colleagues are to be warmly congratulated on a fine piece of work.

J. H. Ross